

BROMELTON — THE COMING OF THE McDONALDS

by Doris Gray-Woods

The first run taken up in the Moreton Bay District was registered in the name of H.H.R. Aikman, as Broomelton. After a short time, T.L. Murray-Prior became a partner, and in 1850 he bought the run and registered it as Bromelton. In 1846 he married and brought his wife to Bromelton, and there their three children were born. One of them, Rosa Campbell Praed, a well known Australian authoress, described the old run in her book, "My Australian Girlhood", calling it Bungoropin, the name the Aborigines had long ago given to the lagoon, meaning "the place of parrots".

This lagoon seemed to dominate the landscape, perhaps because of its depth and size, or perhaps because of the legend of the bunyip, said to have lurked in its waters as far back as the aboriginal people could remember. Campbell Livingstone McDonald brought his wife there in 1859, and from that date until he died in 1909, Bromelton was his home. There the rest of the large family of fourteen children were born, and there both he and his wife Rachael died. Their graves are still on Bromelton. After buying the property Campbell McDonald set about replacing the little slab and bark hut that had been built in 1842, with a home big enough for his growing family.

Helped by the Aborigines, he felled the old red cedars in the scrubs, and cut them into slabs two inches thick. Iron barks were cut for shingles for the roof, and then workmen were brought from Brisbane to build the house. Carefully slotted and dovetailed in the old manner without any nails, Bromelton house lasted over ninety years without any major repairs being needed.

As in the time of the Aborigines and the Murray Priors, the lagoon always dominated the life of the McDonalds. It flooded in a time of heavy rains, when the Logan River spilled over, sending water racing through to the swamps behind, and cutting off all contact with the world outside. It also gave the cattle and the household much needed water and provided them with fish, while at sunset great flocks of parrots would swoop over its still water as they had always done and so giving the lagoon its name.

Mrs Doris Gray-Woods is a descendant of four Queensland pioneer families. Besides C.L. MacDonald who settled the Fassifern in 1841, her great grandfathers were Thomas Clark who emigrated on the *Fortitude* in 1849 and opened a store in Queen Street, Surveyor James Warner who came to Moreton Bay in 1839, and W.A. Brown, who went to Port Curtis in 1847 as Sheriff of the proposed colony and who in 1859 became first Sheriff of Queensland.

When fish were plentiful the Aboriginal tribes for miles around would come to Bungoroopin, to feast, to dance their corroborees, and often to engage in an exhilarating fight. At first the Bromelton household found this rather alarming, and would sit up all night with guns, watching. But no violence was ever offered to them, so they gradually relaxed their vigilance, and watched the reflections of fires and dancing figures with interest.

My mother was a Macdonald of Bromelton. She grew up in old Bromelton House, with her many brothers and sisters, and also with her seven Cameron cousins; for after their parents' tragic deaths in 1862, the Cameron children (of Undulla) all made Bromelton their home. My mother told me of her grandparents, Lieut. Quartermaster Hugh McDonald and his wife Mary Anne, who had come to Sydney with the 46th regiment in 1814; of her grandfather's death in Sydney, in 1819, a year after his youngest son, my grandfather was born; of the coming of the McDonald brothers, C.L. and Macquarie to the Fassifern in 1841, and of the property they took up there later and called Dugandan. It was a wonderful story, and one thing about it particularly caught my attention. My grandfather and his brother were Australians unlike most of the other pioneers. I knew then why Old Bromelton House had seemed so essentially Australian, that it seemed part of the Australian landscape.

NOTES

References

Mrs J.C.L. Gloster, Buderim.

McDonald letters and papers.

A.C.C. McDonald Esq, Melbourne. McDonald papers.

My own McDonald papers.

Footnote:

The Macdonalds of Bromelton changed their name from McDonald when Campbell, son of Macquarie inherited Dugandan an adjoining run, and there was a great deal of confusion in the mail. This happened in the middle seventies, and until then both families spelt their names in the same way.